

Priscilla Swanson Harris, 101

Priscilla Ingrid Swanson Harris, last surviving child of pioneer Swedish West Duxbury immigrants, peacefully passed from this earth on July 7, 2015— eight days short of her 102nd birthday. She leaves behind three children, six grandchildren, four great-grandchildren (with one on the way), five nephews, a host of grandnieces, grandnephews and their children.

Priscilla was born on July 15, 1913 in the same house she died in, the fifth of six children of the Rev. Emil Olaf Swanson and Matilda Liljeblad Swanson, first-generation Americans who moved to High Street and worked at making a go of their farm. She attended Tarkiln School, riding in a horse-drawn “barge” through snow in the winter, and then Duxbury High School.

She doted on her giant Newfoundland retriever Buddy, who had been given to the family by two “handsome young guys” from Brookline named Joe and Jack Kennedy.

With the encouragement of her art teacher, she applied to the Massachusetts School (now College) of Art, was accepted, and undertook a rigorous four-year education in drawing and painting.

After graduating, Priscilla, like everyone else, scrambled for work in the middle of the Great Depression. She found it, drawing original art— on greeting cards— and thanks to her talent made a decent living. While at one such company, she met Ed Harris and, eventually, began a marriage that lasted from 1942 until Ed’s death in 2007.

During the war, when Ed was posted in Virginia, she fabricated ductwork for aircraft carriers at the Newport News Shipyard— one of the first women in the country to do so.

After the war, they settled in Hingham where Ed became guidance director at Cohasset High.

Priscilla, mindful of her mother’s exhortation to “see the world,” prodded Ed into applying for a teaching position with Air Force Overseas Schools. In 1956 the young family left Hingham for England, living successive school years in Liverpool, London and Tripoli, Libya, while spending summers touring Scotland, Germany and reuniting with relatives in Sweden.

Returning to Hingham in 1959, Priscilla continued with her painting and was active in the arts community of Hingham, and nearly single-handedly created an arts community in Westerly, RI.

When the family homestead came on the market, she and Ed bought it and spent the next several summers making it habitable before moving in for good in 1966.

Happily back in Duxbury, Priscilla continued her community activities as a founding member of the Free Library’s original book club, an artist who frequently exhibited around the South Shore and an early force behind what became the Duxbury Art Complex Museum.

As a writer, she made a modest literary splash when her hilarious reminiscence “Highway Robbery” was published in the May 1973 Yankee Magazine. She was also a frequent contributor to the Clipper, and was last featured in its Feb. 8, 2012 article “A Clipper Visit: Priscilla Harris.”

Until her health made it impossible, she was a regular congregant at the High Street Methodist Church, where her father had preached over half a century before.

There she and Ed were part of a group who, for over twenty years, went one afternoon a month to the “Massachusetts State Hospital for the Criminally Insane” at Bridgewater to sing, dance, pray, play cards and eat cake with sad, damaged men who had once done something horrible and were never going to be free again. This, to Priscilla, was simply what she expected of herself as a follower of Christ and Saint Paul.

In her declining years, Priscilla did not decline. She remained a friend and advisor to many, a gracious hostess and a terrific cook, with deep insights, a sparkling wit and an open heart.

She treasured her grandchildren and her great-grandchildren. She will be deeply missed.

Survived by daughters Squidge Liljeblad Davis of Monroe, ME and Martha Harris (Husband Richard Lee – in many ways a second son to Priscilla) of Jamestown, RI and son John Harris of Tucson, AZ; and grandchildren Meadow Slater (Trevor), David Harris (Kim), Daniel Harris, Delilah Montemayor (Joe), Elizabeth Harris and Priscilla Harris; great-grandchildren Skylar, Caden, Greer, and Natalie; Nephews Bruce, Paul, Peter, Phillip and David and their many descendants; and her beloved Cousin Hans-Olof Ohlsson and wife Gitten of Raa, Sweden.

Also by special friend Louis “Bud” Blaisdell of East Orland, ME and by her friend and constant caregiver Judith Hutton of Pembroke, MA. We also fondly remember her lifelong dear friend Margaret “Judy” MacGregor of Haverhill, MA, who passed away just thirteen days before Priscilla.

A memorial service will be held at a later date, and Clipper readers will be notified.



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